

INTRODUCTION TO THE NHAL ALTERNATIVES

Purpose of State Forests

The management alternatives presented here are an important step in the process of developing a master plan for the Northern Highland-American Legion (NHAL) State Forest. The Department's master planning rule (Wisconsin Administrative Code NR44) identifies that these alternatives and the final property master plan must meet the statutory purpose of the property's designation. In this case, the property is a state forest as defined in Wisconsin Statutes 28.

State forests such as the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest are an important part of the Department's broader mission to provide leadership in "all matters pertaining to forestry within the jurisdiction of the state...and advance the cause of forestry within the state" (ss28.01). In order to define this mission, the purposes and benefits of state forests are outlined in the following language of 28.04 (2):

(a) The department shall manage the state forests to benefit the present and future generations of residents of this state, recognizing that the state forests contribute to local and statewide economies and to a healthy natural environment. The department shall assure the practice of sustainable forestry and use it to assure that state forests can provide a full range of benefits for present and future generations. The department shall also assure that the management of state forests is consistent with the ecological capability of the state forest land and with the long-term maintenance of sustainable forest communities and ecosystems. These benefits include soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics. The range of benefits provided by the department in each state forest shall reflect its unique character and position in the regional landscape.

(b) In managing the state forests, the department shall recognize that not all benefits under par. (a) can or should be provided in every area of a state forest.

(c) In managing the state forests, the department shall recognize that management may consist of both active and passive techniques.

The management alternatives all meet this statutory purpose and will be evaluated to determine how well they could potentially satisfy the unique role of a state forest.

The management alternatives and the master plan for the NHAL State Forest must also implement the vision and goals for the property, which were developed in an earlier stage of the public involvement process.

Draft Vision Statement

The Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest is a dynamic environment comprised of a variety of biological communities that contribute to the diversity of ecosystems in the region. The state forest provides a range of cultural, social, economic and ecological benefits, within its capabilities, for present and future generations. The unique, aesthetic character of the NHAL State Forest and the quality of its waters are perpetuated and enhanced. The forest is managed in consultation with federal, tribal, local and other governments, and with other people who care about the forest, including those who live, work and recreate in and around it.

Draft Property Goals

1. Provide a diversity of terrestrial and aquatic biological communities, including a range of forest types and age classes, with emphasis on communities that are special to the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest.
2. Maintain and enhance aesthetic qualities of the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest.
3. Identify and protect endangered and threatened resources, historic properties, and areas of geological, archaeological or cultural significance.
4. Provide a variety of renewable forest products consistent with forest capabilities.
5. In consultation with tribal governments, provide for the availability and enhancement of treaty resources.
6. Provide a variety of recreational settings and activities, ranging from primitive to developed, consistent with resource capabilities.
7. Provide a diversity of hunting, trapping, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities.
8. Protect and enhance wild resource values such as solitude, remoteness, and the sights and sounds of a natural environment.
9. Resolve or minimize conflict among different types of recreational uses and among various types of forest uses and management activities.
10. Provide a variety of educational opportunities for state forest visitors.

Overview of the NHAL Alternatives

As part of the master planning process Department staff have prepared 6 Land Management Alternatives, 4 Recreation Management Alternatives and 5 Wild Resource Areas Alternatives that represent a range of possible management options for the NHAL State Forest. The development of a range of alternatives is required by the Wisconsin Environmental Protection Act (WEPA) in Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 150 and the Master Planning Guidelines (Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 44). These alternatives are based on ideas and comments we received from the public to date, on information from many studies including the Northern Forest Assessments and on the state's nearly 100 years of experience in managing the property. Staff that contributed to these concepts included representatives from fisheries, wildlife, recreation, endangered resources, water resources, and forestry. The team emphasized an ecosystem approach to the management plan, and they are involved with the management of their respective specialties.

The State Legislature established the Northern Highland State Forest in 1925 and the American Legion State Forest in 1929 from forest reserves set aside previously in Forest, Oneida and Vilas counties. The two forests were managed separately until 1968, when they were combined into one administrative unit. Today, the NHAL is Wisconsin's largest state owned property, at about 225,000 acres.

These alternatives are intended to provide the public with a wide range of management alternatives. Each alternative is based on a statement that defines the general theme for the entire forest. It is expected that the preferred alternative—the next step in the process—will be a combination of parts of many of these concepts. The alternatives are based on detailed information but were simplified to provide an overall picture of the future management options. For detailed supporting information please refer to the

“Shaping the Future” source book and the Northern State Forest Assessments. (See the literature order form.) The final plan will be the management strategy that the Department has determined best meets the purpose of a state forest and the vision and goals for the NHAL.

Management Elements Contained in All Alternatives

The following laws, policies, facilities, and other factors would automatically be included in every alternative and are considered mandatory elements of all alternatives.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

- In compliance with the Chippewa Treaty rights litigation and the Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 44, the DNR consults with tribal governments during the development of master plans for state lands in the Ceded territory.
- In September of 1999, DNR staff and tribal representatives agreed to the following goal for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest: “In consultation with tribal governments, manage the land and other natural resources to provide for the exercise of Chippewa Treaty rights in accordance with applicable law.”

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- DNR policy is to identify and remove trees that are deemed as hazards within designated use areas such as campgrounds, picnic areas, parking lots, and high use trail systems. Designated use areas will be maintained to provide a safe environment for those using these areas.
- Construction of facilities will follow guidelines set forth within the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Administrative DNR buildings are located within the boundaries of the state forest and will be maintained and upgraded as necessary.

FOREST PEST CONTROL

- As stated in Wisconsin Statutes 26.30, “It is the public policy of the state to control forest pests on or threatening forests of the state...”, This means that all proposed management alternatives for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest must include the ability to implement appropriate forest pest control measures as needed.

FIRE SUPPRESSION

- As stated in Wisconsin Statutes 26.11, “The Department is vested with power, authority and jurisdiction in all matters relating to the prevention, detection and suppression of forest fires outside the limits of incorporated villages and cities in the state except as provided in sub (2), and to do all things necessary in the exercise of such power, authority and jurisdiction”. This means that all proposed management alternatives for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest must include the ability to implement appropriate forest fire suppression measures as needed.

ENDANGERED/THREATENED RESOURCES

- All management actions occurring on the state forest will be done in a manner which does not result in a direct taking of any known threatened / endangered resource.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

- The ability to implement any management element of a proposed concept is influenced by forces beyond the control of the master plan. Obvious factors such as rainfall and severity of winters can have significant impacts on the ability to implement master plan elements, particularly those related

to ecological restoration. However, other forces such as high deer and hare populations are also a concern. These animals have significant impacts on forest regeneration, particularly for species such as eastern hemlock. Populations of these herbivore species are influenced by hunting pressure, private land practices (feeding) and the severity of winter in addition to practices within the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest. Therefore, these external forces must be considered when evaluating the ability to implement any management proposal.

UTILITY CORRIDOR (Gas, Power)

- There are many easement and land use agreements with various public utility companies for facilities such as powerlines and gas pipelines running through forest property. All existing agreements will be honored.

MUNICIPAL JURISDICTION WITHIN THE STATE FOREST (County and Township roads)

- There are numerous state, county, and town roads within the state forest boundary. These roadways will continue to be managed outside the scope of this master plan for the NHAL State Forest.

EASEMENT OF RECORD (Land use agreements)

- Easements of record and land use agreements exist which provide access across state property to private ownership within the forest boundary.

HISTORICAL SITES

- Management activities on the state forest will take into consideration historical sites and will not knowingly impact any features of historical or cultural importance.

MAINTAIN AESTHETICS AND BMP'S

- All management activities within the state forest will follow best management practices (BMPs) for water quality. Aesthetic management guidelines will be followed as outlined in the DNR silviculture and forest aesthetics handbook.

FUNDING CONSTRAINTS

- The development of a property master plan is just the first step toward implementation of a management program on a Department property. The final master plan for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest may contain a variety of new plans ranging from recreational facilities to ecological restoration. All management activities require funding, equipment and staffing to implement. If these new plans cannot be implemented with existing resources on the forest then new resources will need to be requested from the state legislature through the normal budget process. The ability to implement any master plan element will depend on the budgetary authorization granted to the Department of Natural Resources by the legislature.